

Editha
Series

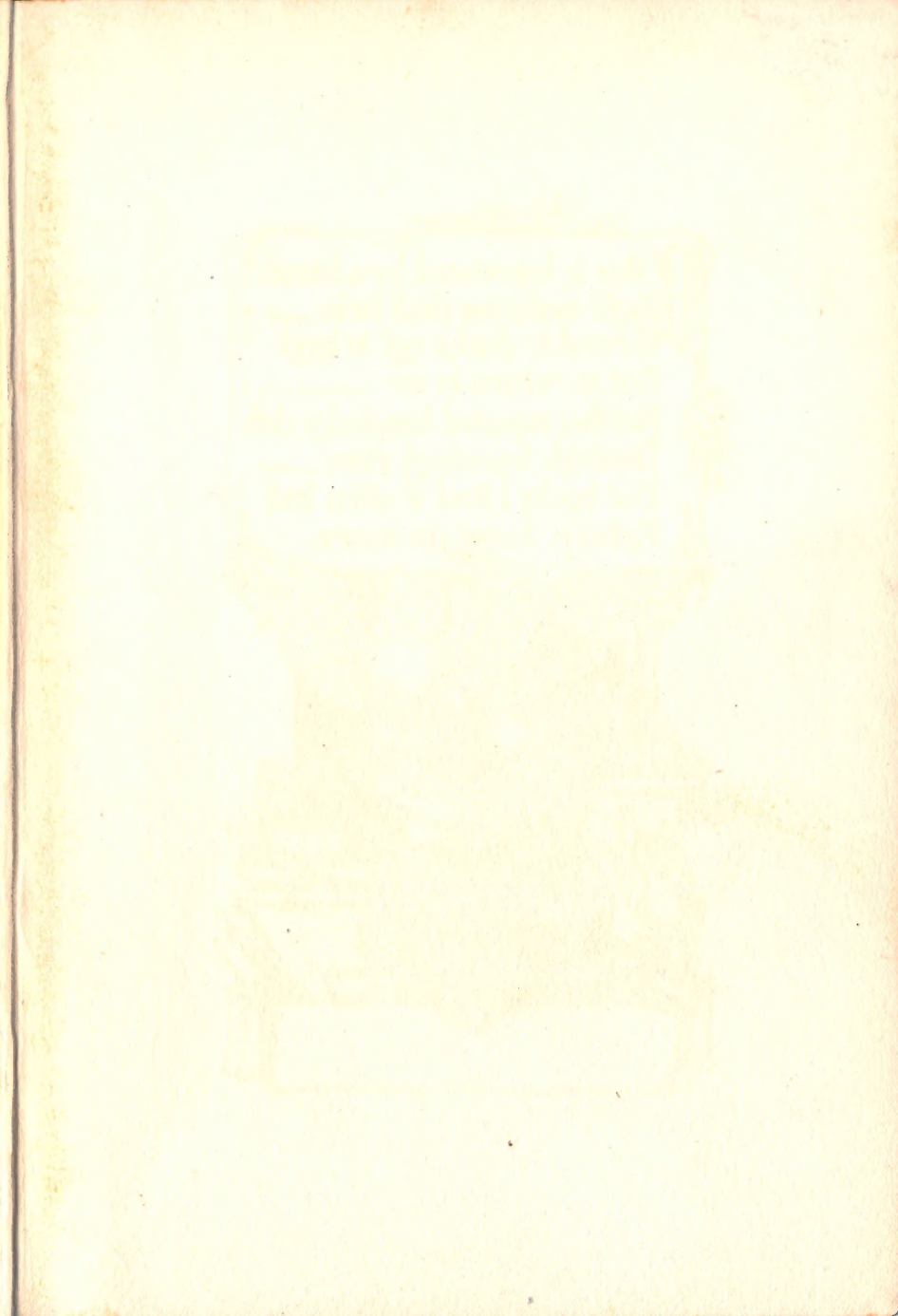


Daddy Joe's
FIDDLE



If this is borrowed by a friend
Right welcome shall he be —
To read, to study, not to lend
But to return to me —
Not that imparted knowledge doth
Diminish learning's store —
But books I find if often lent
Return to me no more.





DADDY JOE'S FIDDLE

The Editha Series

For Little Girls

NEW EDITION, 1912

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"CHEE'S FACE GLOWED. SHE WOULD MAKE MUSIC FOR
HERSELF"

The
EDITHA SERIES



ADDY JOE'S FIDDLE

**By
FAITH BICKFORD**

**With Illustrations by
EDITH FRANCIS FOSTER**



**H. M. CALDWELL CO.
PUBLISHERS ♡ ♡ ♡
NEW YORK @ BOSTON**

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DADDY JOE'S FIDDLE

CHAPTER I.

A TALL clock in the hall was striking eleven. A tired, but very wide-awake, little girl was climbing the stairs. "Land sakes, child! Hear that? Go straight to sleep now. It's wicked for grown folks to be up this time of night, say nothing of young 'uns."

The child made no reply. She had nothing to say. Older people than Chee have *learned* to be silent; in her case, lessons had been unnecessary. Softly closing her chamber door, Chee blew out the little flame that had lighted her way up the creaking stairs. Instead of going *straight to sleep*, she sat down by the open window and began to unbraid her long, stiff hair. Impatiently she

stopped, and clenched her brown hands. Her cheeks burned as she broke out in bitter whispers, "Oh, the music! The music! And Aunt Mean called it wicked. It wasn't wicked. It was lovely. It made me want to fly right up to heaven. Guess things that make you feel that way aren't wicked. She couldn't have heard it much," continued the child, excitedly. "She was watching the people in front of us, and 'zaminin' their clothes. Told Uncle Reuben how many different kinds of stuffs were on Mrs. Snow's bonnet; and that beautiful, beautiful song going on all the while. It wasn't wicked! The choir at church isn't wicked, and this is fifty times nicer. 'Sides —" Her hands dropped limply to her lap. Her eyes lifted from their watch down the road which lay white and smooth in the moonlight, the shadows of the trees crouching dark on either side. Gazing up at the stars she continued, tenderly, "My Daddy Joe made music on one. He called it his 'dear old fiddle,' he loved it so. No, it can't be wicked."

With the thought of Daddy Joe came a new grievance. "And I just won't let any one hurt it, either, I won't. I love it, too. If Aunt Mean

knew, she'd call me wicked, but she sha'n't know — ever. I'll make out I didn't like the concert, so she can't guess. No, I won't, either, I suppose that 'ud be a lie. I just won't say anything 'tall about it, 'cause I did like it. Oh, how I liked it, though! Still, I most wish there had been some one for me to stay with, so's I couldn't have gone, 'cause now I'll wish and wish for always to hear some more.

“I wouldn't mind so much about the girl in a white dress that sang those songs, or the man who played on the black organ, somethin' like the one at Sunday school, only blacker and sweeter — it's the fiddle I mind. It sounded like the river when it rubs against the little stones and tumbles over the rocks; and pretty soon it seemed just like the stream by the mill-dam, so big and strong-like, with it's mind all made up. And then, by and by, it whispered. I wanted to cry then, — it was funny when I liked it so, too, — it whispered ever and ever so low, like the leaves talk together just before the rain falls, almost just like a violet smell could be if it made any noise.”

The moon was rising above the trees. The

beauty of the mill-stream music was forgotten for the murmuring leaf sounds. A softer mood stole over her heart, stilling its turmoil.

Chee laid her head against the window-frame. Lower and lower it drooped, until it rested on the sill. The moon had disappeared when she awoke. The road was swallowed up in blackness. The room was so dark she could not see her little bed. She felt around, found it, and crept in. Still, sweet, far-off strains echoed through her dreams, bringing a smile — half-rapt, half-yearning.

CHAPTER II.

IT was scarcely daylight. A small white figure was picking its way, barefooted, across the dusty attic floor. It paused beside an old-fashioned, hair-covered trunk. Chee's waking thought had been of the wonderful concert. Led by some unconscious motive, she had sought the loft for a sight of Daddy Joe's fiddle. Raising the lid of the trunk, she slowly drew forth one article after another, — a scarlet shawl with little glistening beads fastened in its fringe, a pair of moccasins, a heavy Indian blanket wrought in gay colors, a silken scarf. She thoughtfully stroked the rich goods of the scarf and slipped her feet into the moccasins. "My mamma's feet were most's little's mine," she said, in the customary whisper of her reveries.

Spying a small box, she pulled it out and opened it. Across its cover was printed in large, uneven letters, "Mamma's Playthings." Lovingly she took

in her arms a much worn corn-cob dolly ; only a few streaks of paint were left for its face, only a few wisps of hair for its wig. She handled some little acorn cups and saucers as though they had been the frailest of china. Then, with a sigh, she remembered what had brought her to the attic, and laid aside several rudely moulded figures of clay. The trunk was almost emptied of its contents before she drew forth a battered violin case, opened it, and with reverent hands lifted out Daddy Joe's fiddle. The bridge had slipped ; instinctively she straightened it. " My Daddy Joe's own dear fiddle." Closing her eyes, she tried to remember how he had looked with the violin under his chin. Perhaps, after all, imagination as well as memory painted the picture before her, — her father's tall, straight form as he drew the bow across the strings ; a fainter vision of the gaily blanketed woman by his side.

" And I was there, too," she murmured, dreamily fingering a string of Indians beads that hung around her neck. For some reason Aunt Mean has never taken these away from her. With a fold of her night-robe she began to polish the instru-

ment. In doing so she disturbed one of its yellow strings. A low, trembling note vibrated through the loft. Chee's face glowed. She would make music for herself. Why had she not thought of that before? In her delight, the child put both her arms around the old violin and passionately hugged it.

Taking the bow from its place, she said, "I'll find the way they do it. I'll begin this very night. Nobody shall hear it, 'cause they're way downstairs. 'Sides, they'll be asleep."

Chee trembled with excitement. "I'll hide it where I can find it in the dark," she continued, stealthily, "so Aunt Mean'll never know. She'd most kill me if she found out. I wonder why her mother named her such a name. Maybe she guessed what she'd be like when she got old, like the squaws used to long ago, or maybe it only just happened to fit her." With these meditations she carefully hid the old violin box behind a chest.

Miss Almeana Whittaker, the while, was placidly untying her nightcap. (Nightcaps were still useful to Miss Almeana.) She was not in the least suspicious that her heathen niece, as she chose to

call her, was awake at this early hour. She often told her brother that children kicked against going to bed at night, and might just as well kick about getting up in the morning. To Chee, she would say, "Go to bed so's to get up."

"Chee! Chee!" came from the stairway.

"Yes, Aunt, I'm awake."

"What's struck her to wake this early?" she asked, but that was the last she thought of it.

CHAPTER III.

OH, the excitement of the days that followed that memorable concert! The pleasure, to Chee, of a secret all her own! The attempts and failures to *make music*! She was not even familiar with the beginnings of melody; if she had heard of a scale, she did not know its meaning. So, for awhile, she tried with her little, trembling fingers, to draw tones from the old, loosened strings.

After repeated trials and no music, she grew discouraged; even her untrained ear found something very, very wrong. "It's the fiddle," she concluded, "it's too old. It won't work. If I only had a new one now, brandy-new from the store, I know I could do it. I hear lots of songs in my head, but I can't hear them in the fiddle." However, the idea that the violin was too old was soon corrected.

One Sunday morning Chee sat in church, thinking

there must be baby birds just outside a window near. The songs the old birds were singing made her think so. It had been a bright day, but for a moment the sky was clouded.

"What a terrible big bird Culloo¹ must be to hide the whole sun! There, he's gone now. I do hope he will stay away." Chee shuddered a little. Aunt Mean frowned at her from the end of the pew. She could not understand her niece's fanciful, almost superstitious ideas. It was not strange that so sensitive a nature as Chee's, of which the fantastic beliefs of her mother's race were a prominent part, could have little in common with the blunt, doctrinal mind of Aunt Mean.

All the little sounds of the outdoor world had each a separate individuality for Chee. The tall, stiff poplars in the churchyard, mingling their metallic rustle with the dainty murmur of the willows, caused Aunt Mean to think, "I guess it's going to blow up a storm, the trees air a-rattling."

"The poplars are singing with the willows," thought Chee. "Their voices sound together just

¹ Culloo is a mythical bird so large as to hide the sun when he flies before it.

like little Sadie's and her grandpa's when they stand up to sing." Sadie was a dear, wee tot of a girl, with soft, flying hair. She sat in the pew ahead of Miss Almeana. Her grandpa was a tall, stiff-jointed old gentleman. He wore a very long, shiny coat, and, no matter how warm the day, there was a turkey-red scarf around his neck. His eyes were small, and glinted like steel. His nose was thin and straight, and his face always pale. When he left his pew he immediately put on a high silk hat. Nor did he consider himself in church until he had reached his old-fashioned seat and closed its door.

Chee did not like the grandpa very well, he made her feel chilly, she said ; but often she longed to change her own stiff, jetty hair for Sadie's fuzzy curls. Her thoughts of the birds and the trees and Sadie's curls were suddenly checked by Mr. Green, the minister, who was saying, "It is something like a violin — the older it grows, and the oftener it is used, the more valuable it becomes."

Chee instantly straightened herself in her seat. "Did he mean the older it is the better it plays? How could he? How funny! Other things wear

out, why don't fiddles? Guess he must be mistaken, 'cause 'less Daddy Joe's is too old, what can be the trouble? Wouldn't the minister think I was wicked, though, if he knew I loved it like I do? I s'pose 'course he would, 'cause he's Aunt Mean's minister."

That Aunt Mean could have a minister who did not think just as she, never occurred to Chee.

"But if I could only make him promise not to tell, he couldn't — ever, 'cause he's a minister."

A few evenings longer she struggled on. The same discordant tones were the only result. One night the horrible sounds were more than she could bear. With a shiver, she put away the naughty fiddle. Baffled and broken-hearted, she crept down to her room. "What shall I do? Oh, what shall I do?"

Worn out, she threw herself on the floor, and did something very unusual for Chee — she began to cry. "Nobody can help me. I'm all 'lone. Nobody's here 'cept Our Father, I s'pose He's here, 'cause He's always everywhere; but I don't feel Him very much anywhere. Any way, He wouldn't make music for me. He used to for Musmi and his

friends, but perhaps He isn't so fond of music as He used to be when they lived."

The thought of heavenly music fascinated her. "I wish I was an angel, I do. I'd dare ask Him then, any way. He used to do such things for people in the stories Daddy told me. But Mr. Green only says He can make us good and such things. I wonder," she said, slowly, trying to grasp a new idea, "I wonder if He couldn't make Mr. Green think the fiddle isn't wicked. If He could only do that so I knew Mr. Green wouldn't tell Aunt Mean, I could ask him about old fiddles being as good as new."

She still lay on the floor. Looking up at the faintly blinking stars, she murmured, "I don't believe it would be wrong to ask Our Father to try, 'cause Our Father and I know the fiddle isn't wicked, even if Aunt Mean and the minister don't. I am going to ask Him, any way, this very night."

This resolution seemed to comfort her. Beginning to undress, she tried to think out a prayer. Poor little Chee! She did not realize that as she had been lying on the floor, looking up at the

stars, her heart had offered its petition. So she kept on framing a prayer that had already been heard.

At last, kneeling by her bed, she said over the carefully chosen words, "Our Father, who art in heaven and everywhere, I love Daddy Joe's fiddle very much. Better even than the real china tea-set that Cousin Gertrude sent me, or my string of beads. But I can't make music on it, I'm afraid it's too old. Mr. Green said it couldn't be, but I'm afraid I didn't understand him right. I want to ask him. Can't Thou make him not call me wicked, nor Daddy Joe, nor ever tell Aunt Mean, 'cause Thou knows how mad she'd be." Chee paused. This was the prayer she had planned, but something seemed lacking. After a moment she added, "And if Thou do, I'll do something for Thee sometime, only I can't think of anything now. Thy kingdom come. And finally save us. Amen."

CHAPTER IV.

NEXT day Chee plucked up courage and said, "Aunt Mean, please may I pick a bunch of white peonies and carry 'em down to Mrs. Green?" Aunt Mean was straightening the rag-carpet rugs on the kitchen floor. "Take hold the end of this mat, Chee. Well, I don't know, seems like you wanted to be on the go the hull time. Only last week you rode over to the 'Corners' with your uncle, and 'tain't a month since you was took to a reg'ler concert—in the town hall, too. But I don't know but you might as well go, an' stop on the way an' ask Mis' Snow for that apern pat'en she said she'd just's liev I took."

"Yes'um," and Chee bounded away to gather her flowers.

"Beats all, that child does, still's a mouse inside, wild's a deer the minute she's out." This

had been spoken to a neighbor who had "jest dropped in a minute."

"Well, I s'pose it's her Injun blood, isn't it?" was the reply. "What a worry she must be to you, Miss Almeana. She's well brung up, though, if she is half savage, I will say that."

"Poor Joe's runnin' off an' marryin' was a dretful thing," stated Aunt Mean, "dretful for him, and dretful for us."

"No doubt she was purty, and I s'pose findin' she'd lived so long with a white family made some difference," the neighbor remarked. There was a shadow of romance about her nature; there was not even that about Aunt Mean's.

"It was better'n though he'd found her naked in a wigwam, but 'twas bad 'nough," dryly returned poor Joe's sister.

"Prob'ly the greatest attraction was her voice. It must have been purty hard on so good Meth'dist people as you an' Reuben be, to have one of your own kin go roun' fiddlin' fer shows with an Injun singin' woman fer his wife."

Miss Almeana did not consider it proper to tell what an affliction this had been to her, but with

a clear conscience she told, for at least the fiftieth time, how Reuben "took on." After that came poor brother Joe's taking on; how, when his wife died, he left his profession to wander about the world, clinging to his baby girl for comfort in his loneliness; how, at last, he came back to the old homestead, sick — body and heart. "He only lived a couple o' years longer, and most o' that time he set round with the young'n in his arms," went on Aunt Mean.

The neighbor had heard it all before, but she was interested.

"Reuben thinks that more'n half what killed him was heartbroke'ness. Mebbe it was. He was allers kinder soft like, and that old fiddle of his'n only made him wuss. I used to hate the sight on it. Think of the waste o' money! Sold his whole half the farm to buy it — meadow lot and all. I tell you what, I chucked that thing out o' sight mighty sudden after he died."

"Did you burn it," asked her listener, in an awed voice, "after he had loved it so?" Aunt Mean quailed a little.

"Laws! no, Mis' Bowman, I ain't quite so Spar-

tan as that. I didn't have courage. But I stuck it up attic for good and all. It never'll come down as long as I keep house here, either."

"Well, I must say, Miss Almeana," interrupted her acquaintance, anxious to appease the old lady, "you don't work the child very hard. What does she do, anyhow?"

"She? Oh, what I tell her to. It's easier to do most everything yourself than be botherin' round with children. She's coming on nine, though, and I don't want it on my conscience that I didn't do my duty by her—if she is a heathen—so I s'pose it's about time I broke her in."

Perhaps a very faint vision of what Chee's *breaking in* might mean, rose before the neighbor's mental sight, for she said, in relenting tones, "Oh, well, I don't see's you've any cause to hurry. She's right smart and will learn mighty fast when she once starts in."

"Humph!" said Aunt Mean, and Mrs. Bowman never quite made up her mind whether she had helped Chee's cause or not.

While the housewives gossipped, the little girl

was wending her way to the clergyman's house. She did not walk very fast. It was warm and dusty, and she was busily thinking. After all, she was somewhat loath to reach her destination. At last she came to the small, white parsonage. Her heart seemed to pound as loudly as her hand as she knocked upon the door. The minister's wife herself answered the knock.

"Aunt Mean sent you these."

"Why, thank you, Chee, thank you. And such a hot day, too. Would you like a drink of water?" Instead of water, the lady brought a glass of milk from the cellar. Chee sipped it slowly. It was delicious after the long, hot walk, but she felt anxious over her errand.

"I hope he won't think I've workings of a spirit like Deacon Herring had," she thought, a little fearfully.

After Mrs. Green had asked for her uncle and aunt, if they had green corn yet, and if Miss Almeana's currant-bushes would be heavy that year, conversation flagged. Chee still sat on the edge of her chair as though waiting for something to happen.

"What can ail the child?" wondered Mrs. Green. Finally she ventured to ask Chee if she had come on any special errand.

"No - o, not 'zactly an errand, but — but," she hesitated, slowly twisting around her fingers the hem of her short gingham skirt. "Could — please do you care if I see the minister a minute?"

Her hostess laughed. "Care? Why, no, child. I don't keep him put away in the dark."

Chee's black eyes looked frightened. "Oh, Mrs. Green!" she said, "I didn't mean it that way." Dropping her voice to a whisper, she entreated, "Don't say anything to Aunt Mean. Please don't tell."

The lady's kind heart was touched. She loved little children. Quickly stooping to kiss Chee's flushed forehead, she answered, "Tell that you asked to see the minister? No, indeed."

"Thank you." Chee had forgotten for a moment her usual reserve, and stealing her arms around Mrs. Green's neck, she softly kissed her. This was the first voluntary act of affection the child had shown toward any one since her father's death.

Though the minister's wife only remarked in a gentle voice, "I think my husband is up in the hay-mow — there is a nice breeze by the door," she was ever after, to Chee, the ideal of a mother hardly remembered.

While leading her to the barn, the lady asked, "Do you mind going up by yourself?"

"Oh, no, no," answered the little girl. It would be easier to confront the minister alone.

Chee found him lying on the hay with a book over his eyes. She furtively peeped at him several times from the top of the ladder. Finally she concluded he was not asleep.

"Mr. Green," she called. Her voice was not high and clear like most children's; it was strangely deep and rich. "Mr. Green," she repeated.

He looked over his book, exclaiming, "Why, child, how you startled me!" Then in a gentler voice he added, "What brought you here, Little One?"

The pet name helped to ease her fluttering heart. She stepped nearer and quietly studied his face a minute.

"Can you keep a secret?" she asked, still watching him closely.

He was amused with his little visitor and replied, "For how long?"

"Forever," came the instant, firm reply.

Something in the child's earnest face at once sobered the minister.

"That depends, Miss Chee," he answered.

Chee seated herself beside him on the hay. She had forgotten to be afraid.

"Mr. Green," — the bead-like eyes enlarged, and seemed to soften as she spoke, — "you are a minister, and if you once promise you can't break your word — ever, can you?"

"Not and be a true minister, I suppose."

"Then won't you promise?"

"I guess so."

"This is a 'portant matter. 'Guess so' won't do. Say 'yes,' please."

"Well, yes, then, little lawyer." Though just what he was promising was not clear to him, it brought a thoughtful, satisfied expression to Chee's face as, looking down, she sat absently crumpling hay.



“THIS IS A 'PORTANT MATTER. “GUESS SO” WON'T DO. SAY “YES,” PLEASE”

"And what about the secret?" asked the clergyman, after some moments of silence.

She looked up quickly. She had been busy pondering how far she should explain matters, and had half forgotten his presence.

"Why, you know, you said old ones were lots better than new ones, but I am afraid you were mistaken, for Daddy Joe's is very, very bad."

"What are you talking about, child?"

"Why, you said it your very own self, you did." Here was a new difficulty. "A minister can't back out of what he said. And you said it, sir. Don't you remember that Sunday you preached that old ones were better than the new ones? Please think hard."

"Old what?"

"Why, old fiddles. You said so."

"Oh, well, suppose I did. It's a well-known fact, little girl."

"I did understand right, after all, then? But what can be the matter with Daddy Joe's?"

Mr. Green looked more perplexed. "I don't yet quite understand you, Chee. Suppose you begin at the beginning, and tell me all about it."

So Chee commenced, growing more and more interested in her own story as she went on, for were not the minister's eyes smiling into hers as if to say, "You came to the very right person, little Chee — the very right person."

"Then I promised Our Father faithfully," she continued, telling of the night before when she had resolved to consult the minister, "that if He'd do that for me I'd do something for Him. And I will, honest, for He did hear me," she concluded by saying, in a hushed, reverent voice.

Her listener happened to be searching about for his handkerchief just then. The disturbance in the hay caused the dust to fly. This brought moisture to his eyes. Chee gravely offered her small square of linen.

When she had finished telling all about her Daddy Joe's fiddle, he said, gaily, "I am not much of a musician, but long ago when I was in college I owned a violin. It must be in the house somewhere, now. I'll hunt it up, and tell you what little I know about it."

Chee's eyes shone more brightly. Catching hold of her new friend's sleeve, — he had risen

to go down the ladder, — she said, her voice deep with emotion, “I wish I could thank you more than tongue can tell.” It was not a very elaborate thank you, but the glow in her eyes made up any loss of words.

“I never before saw a child so thoroughly in earnest,” he mused. “She must possess an exceedingly passionate nature, or else be extraordinarily fond of music.”

“Oh, dear! Aunt Mean’ll miss me. It’s getting so late, and she won’t let me come again in a long, long time.” But even as she spoke in a troubled way, a smile broke over her face. “He fixed it before,” she said, reverently, “I’ll ask Him again.”

The minister understood, and many a day, when his burdens were heavy, he recalled the faith of a little half-Indian child.

CHAPTER V.

IT was Sunday. The morning sermon was ended, and the choir-leader had played the "walkout," as Chee termed the postlude.

The choir-leader was a very interesting person. He not only led the singing and played the organ at church, but could whistle. And such whistling! Not the every-day wood-pile sort, but the kind that made every boy in town his friend.

He was tall, had a sallow, haggard face and hollow eyes. His spare locks almost touched his shoulders, and appeared to be faded. One knew at a second glance, however, they had never been brighter.

This eccentric-looking gentleman had hardly slipped from off the long bench before the organ, ere the minister had found Aunt Mean and was saying, "Will you kindly do Mrs. Green and myself a favor?"

"You know very well, Elder, any living thing on our farm is at your disposal. If I've said it once, I have said it a hundred times!"

"Well, it is something from your farm, to be sure. We want your little niece for a day — say Wednesday, if it is pleasant."

"Chee?" she exclaimed, with surprise. "For mercy's sake, what do you want o' her?"

"You know how fond of children we are — both of us. We want her to enjoy her. Surely, you can spare the child for a single day."

"It ain't the sparin' on her." But catching sight of Chee's pleading eyes, she added, "I don't want no niece o' mine botherin' round and makin' Mrs. Green a heap o' work."

"No, indeed, Chee would be a real help. You know, Miss Whittaker, a home without a child is often a lonely place."

"Some folks ain't had much chance to find out, lately," and Aunt Mean went off with her favorite "Humph."

For awhile after that eventful visit, matters went more smoothly for Chee.

She was taught how to tighten the strings of her

violin until they formed chords, and how to play scales upon them. Her eyes opened wide with astonishment.

"To think the dear old fiddle hasn't been to blame, after all!" she joyfully cried. "Just me!"

It was a great revelation to her to find the strings had always to be brought up to a certain pitch. "Why, no wonder Daddy Joe's couldn't play if they have to be pulled up every time," she exclaimed, then added, plaintively, "It's years and years since Daddy's pulled up his."

"Of course it's no wonder," laughed her teacher, fingering the companion of his boyhood days. "Even the strings on this are yellow from lying in a paper so long. What must your father's be like? It's a great marvel that they have not snapped before this. No, no, little one, don't condemn the instrument, but keep right on trying to understand it."

Chee, with a light heart, bade the minister and his wife good-by. She had begun to learn how to make music. And were not a whole package of violin-strings in her pocket?

After this it became more natural for the pastor to say Sundays, "May we have Chee to-morrow, Miss Whittaker?" Or, "Mrs. Green wishes me to engage your little niece for Thursday," and Aunt Mean seldom refused.

Chee never quite understood why permission was so readily given. Secretly she puzzled over it, but was far too grateful to ask questions.

The truth of the matter is this — it flattered Aunt Mean to have the minister intimate with her little relative. Moreover, she had an indescribable notion that by allowing her niece to frequent the parsonage, she might in some way counterbalance the child's heathendom. "It's no use for you to tell me different, Reuben," she would argue. "Her mother was a heathen, or Injun" (the two were synonymous in Aunt Mean's mind), "and do what we can, the girl will allers be half a savage."

So Chee — in spite of her aunt's arguing, decidedly a whole person — was allowed to spend one or two days of every week with her friends.

From chords and scales, she learned to pick out simple tunes, those she heard at church being her chief source of selection. After awhile she

learned to play little melodies of her own composing. "Wind and bird songs," she called them.

The clergyman gave her all the rules for violin-playing he knew, and his wife taught her to read music.

They were happy times for Chee, — Mrs. Green at the piano, playing old, familiar hymns, Chee picking out the notes on the minister's violin.

One day she said, "Some way, Mr. Green, I can't love your fiddle like I do Daddy's." Then fearing she might hurt her good friend's feelings, she hastened to add, "It's very much shinier, and of course it's a fiddle." Mrs. Green used to wonder if "fiddle" wasn't the most beautiful word in all the world to Chee.

Three years passed without much change except Chee's gradual improvement and increasing delight in her music.

In Aunt Mean's best parlor, a hymn-book lay in prim stateliness beside the family Bible. It was a coveted treasure to Chee. But the principle of strict honesty was a part of her very soul, in spite of her "heathen" mother, and the Bible was never left alone to gather dust.

Much to her displeasure, she was "broke in." But in time she took her household duties as a matter of course, and things went on much in the same old way.

CHAPTER VI.

ONCE Chee suffered a great scare. The whole secret of her violin threatened to come out.

Neighbor Flannigan often stayed with his cronies at the "Corners" a little too long for his own good. One night, being even less himself than usual, he stumbled into the Whittaker place instead of his own. Too stupid to reach the house, he threw himself down on the grass.

As the effect of his evening's carousing began to wear off, he was startled by the sound of strange music. Seemingly it came from the Whittaker attic.

For awhile he was charmed. What could it be? More and more the mystery of it impressed him. At last frightened by his own ignorant conjectures, he became certain the old house was haunted, and as fast as his shaky legs could carry him he started home on a run.

The following morning he felt it his duty to confide in Uncle Reuben. "I was jest that tired from me day's woruk I had to rest me legs a spell, — you know how it is yourself, Mr. Whittaker, — when thim unairthly sounds blowed up softly loiike, roight out of the chimbly."

"What in the world could the fellow have heard?" asked Uncle Reuben at breakfast.

"Heard? Why, the whiskey rattling his brain," replied Aunt Mean. "Don't look so frightened, Chee. It's wicked to believe in ghosts, and I don't want you to get no sech notions in your head." Perhaps Aunt Mean was giving orders to herself as well as to her niece.

That night Chee scarcely dared play, and it was many a day before her old confidence returned. The full, round tones she loved were stealthily smothered. Fortunately, the house was well back from the road. No neighboring farms were within hearing distance, so her scare was finally forgotten. However, something else happened which caused Chee to leave Daddy Joe's fiddle in silence a long time. It was Cousin Gertrude's coming to the farm.

Chee wore her pink gingham the day she came, and even Aunt Mean was dressed up in a white apron.

"She's the gayest thing, with dancin' blue eyes, and yellow hair and pink cheeks, 'stead of brown 'uns," with unnecessary emphasis on the "brown."

Tears stole down the "brown" ones at this remark by Aunt Mean, who was tightly tying Chee's braids with bits of shoe-strings. (It was a grief to Chee that Aunt Mean should not allow her to braid her own hair.)

"Our Father made my face brown," she kept thinking. "He wanted it so." Yet something seemed to have dulled the brightness of the morning.

"I 'spect she'll call me Ugly Nut, too, like Aunt Mean used to," mourned Chee. She had never attended school, and though her secluded life made her an old child in some ways, it kept her wonderfully baby-like in others. Indeed, it is doubtful if years of learning or contact with wise people could ever take away her simple, questioning-like manner. It might always be "Chee's way."

Soon the carriage wheels were heard on the gravel drive, and sad thoughts were quickly put away in the excitement of Cousin Gertrude's arrival.

Yes, she was, as Aunt Mean had said, a "gay thing." At least, so it seemed as she flew about the house, visiting old nooks and corners, or out calling the chickens and feeding Fanny and the colt.

It was all very startling to Chee, — her lively movements, her merry repartee, and her show of affection. It seemed so natural for Cousin Gertrude to lean her fair head against Uncle Reuben's shoulder. Chee would have felt extremely strange in such an act, even if she were tall enough to reach it. And as for laughing right up into Aunt Mean's face, as though sharp words were only a joke between them, it would have been impossible for Chee to have tried it.

In the afternoon, when she found her pretty cousin sitting idle in the little grove behind the house, there was a change.

The lips that had all day been parted in laughter were drooping. Her blue eyes were watching the hill-tops as though they saw something very sad

over there. At sight of Chee they brightened a little.

"Come here, you tiny witch," she called, making room in the hammock. "Do you know you make me think of a poem I read once called 'The Nut-Brown Maiden.'"

Chee's eyes were shyly raised. "Nut-Brown Maiden is ever so pretty," she said. "Aunt Mean used to call me 'Ugly Nut,' but my daddy was here then and he stopped her. Now she calls me 'Chee.'"

"How odd! I like it, though. Is it an Indian name?" It seemed to the little girl her cousin must love Indian names, she spoke so tenderly. How good it was not to feel in disgrace!

"My real name is Opechee. They call me Chee, for short. Aunt Mean says 'it doesn't holler so loud of Indian wigwams.'"

"'Holler of wigwams,'" echoed Gertrude. "You poor, darling child."

"But I don't mind so much, for I know what it means," murmured Chee, as she smiled up into the deep blue sky. "A song bird — I'd rather be that than anything else." Then turning with

something of Cousin Gertrude's own impulsiveness, she asked, "Oh, isn't it lovely? You can't know how glad I am it's my name."

No, the girl could not understand Chee's strange, almost unreasonable pleasure, but to see the little one so happy could but lighten her own heart.

Many a long talk had they together in that little grove, and during their rambles over the farm. At times Chee would be tempted to unburden her heart of its secret, but, young as she was, she knew Cousin Gertrude had a secret, too; for often when they were talking of the happiest things, the sparkle would die out of the big blue eyes that Chee so lovingly watched.

"Cousin Gertrude has forgotten all about her Nut-Brown Maiden," she would think. "She doesn't tell me her secret, and I won't tell her mine."

And yet before autumn both secrets came out.

CHAPTER VII.

ONE night Chee was feeling very lonely for Daddy Joe's fiddle — more lonely than any night since Cousin Gertrude had been at the farm. It seemed years since she had fingered its dear old strings. She had been very much discouraged that last time. Knowing so well the tones she longed to hear, though she had done her best, she was dissatisfied. Even now she could feel the thrill that entered her soul at the concert, three long years ago.

“If I could only play that way how happy I'd be. I wouldn't care any more about Aunt Mean, nor my face, nor feel the aching so for Daddy Joe, nor anything.”

Chee was troubled with these mournful thoughts when she suddenly became conscious that some one near was crying — very softly, but surely crying.

There was an opening which had been cut

through for a register from Chee's room to the "best room" below.

"It must be Cousin Gertrude, and something awful must be the matter to make anybody big cry almost out loud."

She could not endure it long, just to lie still and listen. Creeping down the front stairs, she noiselessly entered the best bedroom, and slipped her hand into Gertrude's.

"Why, childie, how came you here?" The young lady tried to speak as though tears were not even then rolling down her cheeks.

"To comfort you," was the simple explanation.

For a moment, big blue eyes looked yearningly into little black ones, then dropped, and tears stole from under quivering lashes.

Chee crept closer. "Wouldn't it help you to tell me about your secret?" she asked, sobbingly.

Cousin Gertrude took the little girl in her arms. Sitting on the bed she rocked her gently back and forth, as though to quiet the would-be comforter herself.

"It was because I was angry. I know it. I am all to blame. Who had a better right to tell

me of my faults? But I had been abroad and he hadn't, and he made me so indignant. I've such an awful temper, Birdie, you must never let yours run away with you."

Chee was frightened at her cousin's sudden outburst of confidence, but, with characteristic intuitiveness, she said nothing.

"I forgot that his feelings were just as hard to manage, and I threw it down and declared I would never touch it again as long as I lived. And then he said he would never speak to me again until I had taken back my words.

"Then the carriage came — oh, why didn't it wait a little longer? I would surely have come to my senses in another minute. But I left him and came here. Yet Birdie, Birdie, wouldn't I touch it now if I could — if it wasn't at home and he far, far away!

"Oh, why did I lose my temper? How could I? They always said we were both too hot-headed to get on together. And now all is lost forever, he's gone — he won't come back. Oh, I can never, never forget this night."

The girl ceased her wild, mournful speaking and



“SHALL I ASK OUR FATHER?”

buried her face in her pillow. Uncontrolled sobs shook her form.

Chee was bewildered. She could not understand Gertrude's trouble, but her cousin's misery had become hers. Her fingers trembled while she stroked the bright hair, trying to think of the right thing to say. Soon Cousin Gertrude was quiet. Chee thought her asleep, when a long, quivering sigh escaped. It seemed almost a sob.

Chee had wanted to say something which she had hardly dared; this last sign of grief now gave her courage.

"Cousin Gertrude," she ventured, in a whisper, her lips close to the other's hot cheek.

"Yes, Birdie."

"Would — would — shall I ask Our Father — to make it better?" The moonlight was falling clear on Chee's upturned face. Her eyes shone softly, their usual glittering brightness mellowed. Her long black hair appeared blacker than ever as it fell upon the whiteness of her night-robe.

A feeling of awe came over the older girl. "Can this be the same child," she meditated, "who with

expressionless features obeys Aunt Mean's abrupt commands? Can this be the same little girl who once blushed to tell me her Indian name — this tiny being so strong and trustful, who looks now as though bringing a message from the angels, if she be not one herself? Shall I tell her God cannot help, that I have brought my own trouble upon myself, and I only am to blame?"

But the longer those eyes looked their message into hers, the more unwilling she became to speak this bitterness. "She is but a child, after all. I will not dim the brightness of a faith so beautiful." Finally she answered, in a low and tender voice, "Yes, Birdie, you may ask Him."

"Then good night, Cousin Gertrude." A kiss — and the little comforter was gone.

The next day Gertrude did not leave her room. She had told Aunt Mean that a severe headache made her feel weak. Chee thought she might honestly have said "heartache."

The little girl cheerfully waited on the sufferer, but when once outside the best bedroom, her face was very sober.

"Of course Our Father will make it all right

soon, 'cause I asked Him to be very quick, but I do wish so hard He'd let me help."

Finally the long day drew to a close. Aunt Mean and Uncle Reuben retired. Chee again returned to Gertrude.

She was in the parlor. It was very dark in there, even the dim twilight was shut out. Chee, following Cousin Gertrude's voice, found her sitting by the window.

She threw open the blinds. She could not bear to think her friend was sitting alone in the dark.

"Cheer up, Birdie, I shall be better soon," said the girl at sight of Chee's sorrowful face. But even while she tried to speak gaily, she looked so pale and worn it saddened the little cousin.

Chee started up-stairs, then turning, came slowly back and hesitatingly whispered, "I've told Him all about it. He's surely heard. It'll be all right pretty soon."

"Yes, my comforter," was the only reply.

Up in her own room, how Chee longed for Daddy Joe's fiddle. "I know I could make real music to-night — I know I could," she told herself. "I am sure it would be real, but it would never do;

I mustn't, cause then my secret wouldn't be mine any more."

But the temptation increased, until she resolved to bring out her treasure and look at it. "Just look at it and hold it." That would give a little joy.

CHAPTER VIII.

ABOUT sundown, as the people of Chesterfield say, the train drew into the village. At the station a gentleman stepped off, left his travelling-case at the hotel near, and sauntered up the street.

"Here, Bub," he called to an urchin who, with his hands in his pockets, his legs apparently too long for his trousers, stood eyeing the stranger from the store doorway, "can you tell me if there is a person by the name of Reuben Whittaker residing in this town?"

"Guess you want — Miss Mean's — brother Reuben — don't you?" he replied intermittently, while severely intent upon chewing gum. "She lives — out — to the Bend."

"Is it far?"

"Nope — not more'n — four miles. You just go straight — on, till — you get there."

"Well, that's quite a walk, but I guess I'll try it. Want a nickel?"

"Nope. Pop don't 'low — no pay for — common p'lite — says its — due our country — of her cit'zens."

"Queer little chap, that," mused the traveller. "Pity the rest of us don't have more citizen politeness." The man's face was rather haggard. Several times as he strode along the little path, pulling at the daisies by its edge, he heaved a long sigh.

"I've given in so much," he said, half aloud to himself, "she'll have to give in the rest. How fiery I was, though! Poor little thing! Well, I've said it, and I'll have to stick to it now. I suppose it is all folly my going to the house, but, Great Scott! what's a feller going to do? I can't sleep nights till I've caught a glimpse of her, anyhow. Maybe she's ready to give in now. If she doesn't of her own accord, it will never do for me to say anything — never. That dream I had bothers the life out of me — can't seem to shake it off. Of course she's all right, flying around like a butterfly this minute, most likely," and the young man smiled rather bitterly.

He had come from the city to make sure a girl was not in trouble, but the thought of her enjoying herself made him uneasy.

From the village to the "Bend" was, as he had remarked, quite a distance. In spite of brisk walking it was nearly dark before his destination was reached.

"That must be the place," he thought, quickening his steps as the white buildings of the Whitaker farm loomed up in the dusk.

"What in the world shall I do, now I'm here?" he asked himself, as he paused in front of the house. "If she'd only come out and take back her words it would be all right. But goodness! she's an awful spunky little thing when she's once under way, and it was pretty tough for her. It's mighty certain it's not in her line, but I needn't have been quite so hard with her. Hang it all! what am I going to do now? What in the Dickens made me come, anyway? Only because I'm such a fool I couldn't keep myself away."

He stood leaning against a tree near one of the windows. The summer air was very still. Only occasionally the birds stirred in their nests above

his head and murmured sleepily. Once some restless animal pounded the floor of the barn.

Suddenly a low strain of music startled him. Did it come from one of the open windows? Timidly soft it sounded, as though fearing to let itself be heard — weird and sad.

The man out among the shadows trembled. "Can that be she? Has she given in?"

The music grew more abandoned. In its sorrow it seemed to have forgotten its timidity. The long notes sobbed and moaned, now and then dying into quieter, more entreating tones. In their tears they paused and prayed.

The listener was a musician, and the melody reached the depths of his soul. Facing the window, he called in a broken voice, "Gertrude."

The music instantly ceased. A glad cry rang out, "Herman! my Herman!"

In a second, the man had vaulted the low sill of the parlor window. He hurriedly glanced around the room. No musical instrument could be seen, but a trembling form was steadying itself against the casing.

"Gertie, poor little Gertie!"

A faint voice answered, "Is it true? Can it be you? O Herman!"

Again the music rang out. Triumphant peals this time, strain after strain of tumultuous joy, clearer and clearer, stronger and stronger, until the notes could hardly hold their fulness.

In the parlor Gertrude and Herman stood gazing into each other's startled eyes.

The wild, rapturous song paused; then breaking out in steadier notes, even and rich, it gradually mellowed and hushed until it died away in a whispered breath.

"It ended like a prayer of thanksgiving," said he.

Gertrude caught her breath. "Hush!" She buried her face in her hands, whispering, "It was. I see it all now. It must have been little Chee,—there is no one else." Lifting her head, she added, with a strange, new light in her eyes, "Oh, Herman, she was thanking God for answering her prayer. I believe it." And then, half choked with feeling, she told what she knew of her little Indian cousin.

CHAPTER IX.

Cousin GERTRUDE stole up-stairs. Chee had heard good-byes a few moments before, and was hoping, yet fearing, she might find her.

The child sat by the window removing her stockings. Daddy Joe's fiddle lay on the bed.

"Birdie, how could you? Oh, how could you?"

"I don't know," answered Chee, in an excited voice. "I tried not to play out loud, but I got feeling sorrier and sorrier, and wishing He would only let me help. And I forgot to play still, and then I heard a man's voice, and heard you answer, and I knew everything was all right, and I was so happy I just snatched up Daddy's fiddle and played out my glad. I didn't care who heard, for a minute; and, oh, Cousin Gertrude, I felt it—I felt it."

"Felt what, Childie?"

"Why, the music — way down in my heart, and all over me, just like I did at the concert. I don't know what to call it, but it's something, and I've tried to feel it for such a long time. And now I have, and it makes me so happy — so happy, you can't know. It just makes me glad all through, and I feel like crying, too."

"I am as happy as you, my own little Bird."

Chee's arms were around Gertrude's neck, as she asked, "He did hear, didn't He?"

"Yes, my comfort, He did hear," answered Gertrude, tears again in her voice, "but you helped Him."

"I helped Him?" echoed Chee, shaking her head almost sadly. "No, I wanted to so much, but He didn't need me."

After a little, Gertrude said, "Listen, while I tell you how you helped — you'll see He did need you, after all."

"I love the violin, too — not as you do. I wanted to play because people expected I would. I felt too proud to say that, after years of study, I could never be a great player, and so I kept on working with one teacher after another. Finally,

Mr. Farrar, that is my Herman, told me I had better not spend all my time and money for that any longer. He said I had come to a place where I could never go much beyond, and that I wanted to play more from pride than from love — just because my parents had decided, when I was but a child, that music was my first gift. I had found true what he said, but it made me angry that he should dare to tell me. I said some words back. He retorted. We're both sorry now, but I was so vexed then, I said I would never touch the violin again. My temper offended him, his also rose, and he said he would not speak to me until I took back my words.

“It was the day I had set to come here. He was just going to the woods for his vacation, but he felt so sad he could not go, and went back home instead. Then one night he had a horrible dream that troubled him, so he came to see if I was really safe and well. He says that, down in his heart, he was hoping I was ready to take back my words.

“While he was wishing so much I would come to him — he was out under the trees, you know — he heard music. He thought for a moment I was

playing, and when he reached me and found out I wasn't—well, we were both so glad to be together again we forgot which one was to blame. It seemed very silly to have quarrelled at all when we understood and loved each other so. Anyway, now we are only glad to be together again and forget everything. Can't you see how it might never have come right if you had not played when you did?"

Chee made no answer, her heart was full.

"Of course," she continued, "if he had stopped to think he would have known it never could have been my playing,—he knows me so well,—but he was anxious and didn't realize. It seemed to him, he said, the music must be mine, he wanted so much I should take back my words.

"You did help, my Birdie, but you sha'n't be left to sing alone any longer. Oh!" a new light dawning, "now I know why you love to think Opechee means a song-bird," and she kissed the silent child with new fondness.

"We are going to ride in the morning, my Herman and I, and when we return perhaps we will have something to tell you. But oh, my precious

cousin, you can never, never know all you have done for us."

Chee only answered with a grave little shake of her head, "It wasn't me, 'twas only Our Father, and" — she added tenderly — "Daddy Joe's fiddle."

CHAPTER X.

IN the morning, as he had promised, Mr. Farrar came to take Cousin Gertrude to drive.

“Chee! Chee! Nut-Brown Maiden, where are you?” Stepping to the stairway, Gertrude called, more earnestly, “Birdie, I want you.”

A shy little face peered over the railing, “Please, Cousin Gertrude, have I *got* to come down?”

“Why, Chee, wouldn’t you like to? There is some one here I want you to see.”

“Yes, I know, but I’d rather look at him through the parlor blinds.”

Gertrude showed her disappointment. Chee watched her and yielded, exclaiming, “Well, you must be awful proud of him to feel so bad. I suppose I’d ought to come.”

Cousin Gertrude’s cheeks grew pinker, but she did not look displeased; she only held out her hand to Chee. Wondering what she might say to

put the little girl more at ease, she led her to the veranda.

A gentleman was standing by the carriage block, stroking the mane of a horse. At sight of Chee he quickly removed his hat, as though to some fine lady. "So this is little Chee," said he, "our sweet singer, only she doesn't really sing, she plays. Good morning, my dear."

"Good morning. I don't know just what to call you yet. It doesn't seem quite kind to say 'Mr. Farrar,' when you are Cousin Gertrude's best friend, does it? She calls you 'my Herman,' but I'm afraid she'd rather I wouldn't say that, too."

Mr. Farrar was pleased with this artlessness, characteristic of Chee, so unlike any boldness, so like open confidence in one she instinctively recognized to be worthy. Her voice at such times seemed to say, "I'll trust you, you may trust me."

His eyes twinkled, but he said gravely, seeming not to notice Gertrude, "Suppose you compromise, and say 'our Herman.'"

Chee gave a perplexed glance toward Gertrude. Suddenly a smile brightened her face, as she exclaimed, "Oh, I've got it. Why didn't we think

before? S'pose I call you 'Cousin Herman.'” She gave no opportunity for dissent before adding, “It's so much more comfortable, now I know who you are.”

Cousin Gertrude appeared somewhat confused, but her friend patted the little girl's head approvingly, saying, “Quite right, little Chee, the very thing, indeed —”

“But Birdie,” hastily interrupted Gertrude, “we haven't thanked you yet.” The child cast furtive glances toward the house. Her companions changed the conversation. Their eyes, following hers, had seen others, steel blue, peering through a lace curtain.

“Is Aunt Mean busy?” asked Gertrude.

After a discreet silence Aunt Mean appeared in the front doorway. A brief introduction had scarcely passed before she said, aside to Gertrude, in low but decidedly distinct tones, “A very likely young man, my dear, very likely. You showed good taste. I presume there ain't a better looking in our neighborhood,” adding, reflectively, “It's a mighty serious business, this gittin' a man.”

Chee wondered if Aunt Mean spoke from ex-

perience, and if it wouldn't have been a very serious matter indeed if Aunt Mean had ever attempted to "git" any man other than her brother. During the embarrassment that followed, Mr. Farrar found occasion to remark that it was getting late, and Cousin Gertrude felt obliged to go for her hat. But before entering the carriage she managed to whisper to Chee, "Don't undress when you go up-stairs to-night — we shall be home early."

What a long day it seemed to Chee! How anxiously she listened for the sound of wheels on the driveway!

After all she watched in vain, for they had left the carriage before the Bend was reached. The first she knew of their coming was a step on the stairway — very soft, like stocking feet. She opened the door a little. "Take off your shoes please, Chee, and come down into the parlor awhile."

It was fortunate that the bedrooms occupied by Miss Almeana and her brother were at the extreme end of the house. Furthermore, both were slightly deaf and extraordinarily sound sleepers.

In the parlor the cousins and Mr. Farrar gathered around Chee's tin lamp. "And so you have had no instructor but that minister," he began. "We saw him to-day, and, as he himself says, he doesn't know much about music. You can read notes, he tells me."

"Easy music," answered Chee, bashfully. The dreaded ordeal had come — her secret was out.

"Well, that's good, but how in the world did you learn to manage the instrument? Who taught you to hold it, child?"

"I don't know, Cousin Herman, I think perhaps I hold it just as Daddy did, maybe I don't, though. It's so long since I've seen him I can't be sure." This last was added a little wearily. "What has the way I hold Daddy's fiddle to do with Cousin Herman?" she wondered.

"It's just as I say," exclaimed Mr. Farrar, turning to Gertrude, — "inherited talent. Probably the father was only a fair player, but unless I'm stepping down a peg, the child's a genius." Chee wondered if a genius was something nice, but, because she disliked to show her ignorance, refrained from asking.

"Of course the child has run to weeds — it couldn't be otherwise. I must hear her play again, but at all odds she is a musician." Then turning suddenly to Chee, he asked, "Where is your violin, my dear? You must play your best for me, then Gertrude shall tell you our plan."

Chee looked frightened, "Why, Cousin Herman, I couldn't, she'd hear me — I couldn't for anything."

"Who? Oh, I forgot. Well, we'll have to fix it somehow. Where have you been playing all this while? Up attic? What's the harm now, then?" So saying, Mr. Farrar proceeded to unlace his shoes.

Chee was a little tremulous over the undertaking, but Cousin Herman was firm; so carrying her small lamp she led the way up the front stairs, shielding the flickering flame with her hand. The light fell full upon her excited face. Now and then she paused in the slow, careful ascent to give whispered warning where a stair-riser might creak — all so familiar to her. Mr. Farrar easily stepped over these places, as did Chee, but, lest there should be any slight noise and their stealthy



"SHE STOOD A MOMENT IN MEDITATION, THE VIOLIN
ALREADY UNDER HER CHIN"

journey to the attic he disclosed, he assisted Gertrude over the treacherous places as indicated by their little Indian guide. When the garret was reached, Gertrude seated herself on a trunk. Mr. Farrar leaned against the chimney. Chee lingered at the railing, anxiously listening.

"Chee!" they both impatiently called, at the same time glancing curiously around.

She approached the familiar hiding-place, and very slowly drew out the old violin box. Her cheeks were flushed, and her lips met in a straight line. A brave determination burned in her eyes. She realized in a vague way that much depended upon this effort, but with a pleased, expectant look she deftly attuned the strings of her instrument.

When this was done, she stood a moment in meditation, the violin already under her chin, lightly tapping one foot with the bow.

It was a queer place in which to make one's début, — that dusty corner of the old loft. The tin lamp on a box lighted up the beams hung with long drooping garlands of cobwebs. Not within reach of the lamplight, or the pale moonshine coming through the curtainless windows, huge black

shadows gathered around. But the weirdness of the aspect did not impress Chee ; for her a more familiar spot could not have been chosen. Oh, how many happy hours she had spent in that dim little corner !

Soon her meditative position changed, she had come to a decision, and began to play.

At first, embarrassment hindered her, but before many notes trembled out on the stillness, she had forgotten everything except her song.

It was only the old-fashioned air, "*Annie Laurie.*" The child must have known the words, for her music told, even plainer than any words could tell, the sentiment of the old-time refrain. Perhaps she had guessed more of her listeners' state of mind than they knew. However this may have been, she had chosen well ; while the song lasted, her listeners forgot to be critics — they were only lovers.

The last strains had scarcely died away, when, close upon them, followed the opening notes of "*Nearer, My God, to Thee.*" If the first piece had been selected for her audience, this was for herself.

It was her favorite, the one she most often played. No embarrassment now — with a far-away expression in her eyes, she gave variation after variation of the familiar hymn. Suddenly the bow paused — the note just begun was never finished. A slight noise came from the stairway. After a moment of listening, Mr. Farrar crept to the railing and looked down. Everything was still.

“It must have been only mice,” he said, but Chee was thoroughly frightened. Nothing could induce her to continue. At the first sign of alarm Daddy Joe’s fiddle had disappeared.

CHAPTER XI.

AFTER Mr. Farrar had bade them good night and stolen out the front doorway, Gertrude revealed to Chee their plan.

"We are going to have a concert," she announced. "Mr. Green says you haven't had one here in town since last Christmas — and we're going to get people so interested the whole place will turn out. Herman knows how, for he has gotten up several in the city."

"Get up a concert, why, how can he?" asked Chee, incredulously.

"He will have a chorus. Every child in the village must be in that. And he is going to send for some of his friends, — a man to play the harp, and a lady to sing, and some others. And Herman, you know, plays on the piano, — that's his profession."

"Oh!" said Chee, in a tone of new understanding.

"But wait, dear, the best part is coming. *You* are the best part of all."

"Me?"

"Yes, Birdie, you. That's what the whole thing is for. It's Mr. Green's idea as much as Herman's. It's to be kept a surprise — I mean you are — your name won't appear on the programme at all."

"My name on the programme! Cousin Gertrude, what do you mean?" Poor Chee was thoroughly alarmed now.

"Mean? You dear little monkey, you. Why nothing at all but that you and your violin are going to bring down the house."

"Do you mean my secret has got to come out?"

"Of course. Isn't it already out? More's the pity it has been kept so long."

"But Aunt Mean! Why, Cousin Gertrude, what are you thinking of? You know how she hates it, and calls it wicked." Chee was almost in tears.

"Dear Birdie, can't you see that's what the whole thing is for — to cure Aunt Mean of her

nonsense? You know how proud she is—we think if we can only get her to the hall, that, after she has heard how beautifully you play and how fine people think it is, she will give right in.”

“I’m ’fraid she mightn’t—’sides, Cousin Gertrude, how could I ever play at the hall? I never, never could do that.”

“Chee,” Gertrude’s face was earnest with pleading, “you love your little violin, don’t you?”

“You know I love Daddy Joe’s fiddle best of everything in this world.”

“Well, if you knew that all you ever might learn about it depended upon whether you played at the hall or not, couldn’t you do it?”

“Do you mean I could learn to make music like the man at the concert long ago?” Chee spoke tremulously, and tears filled her eyes as they looked up, so full of yearning entreaty.

“Yes, I think you could. If our concert was a success, so Aunt Mean would let you go, we would take you to the city with us, where you could study music to your heart’s content.”

“Go to the city and learn how to play all I want to!” Chee echoed.

"Can't you get courage to play at the concert, now?" The child's lips compressed for a moment, then she answered in a whisper, "I don't believe she'd ever let me go, but I'll try."

"That's a dear. Don't you worry about Aunt Mean. Just wait until my Nut-Brown Maiden thrills the house."

Chee shook her head dubiously. "Aunt Mean never lets anything make her feel as though she must fly straight to heaven. She can't," said the little girl, translating Gertrude's words into a language of her own.

CHAPTER XII.

BUSY weeks followed. Mr. Farrar frequently came and went — of course to see Gertrude, but often their afternoon drive together was only to and from the parsonage gate.

Finally the day for the concert was set. Artists from a distance were engaged, and the children's rehearsal commenced. Chesterfield life had begun to lag. For the farmers it was less dull than for the townsfolk, on account of the haying. But gossip was scarce, and the news of a concert ahead was a genuine treat.

"Now I wouldn't snap my fingers to hear the school youngsters holler, but regular music fellers from the city — that's something we don't get a chance at every day."

The choir leader made this remark with his usual nasal drawl. The big bulletin of the coming event was being fastened against the wall of the

post-office. A little knot of men and boys had gathered around.

"Well, I don't know as I could 'zactly afford to pay for city finery, but as Sadie and Bill are both a-going to sing, mother 'n' me cal'ated as how we'd have to see they did right proper," replied wee Sadie's grandpa.

"Stuff and nonsense," growled the doctor, as he peered impatiently at the postmistress, as though that meek little person was to blame for the tardiness of a letter, "waste of time and money." But the doctor was a bachelor, and "took in the shows," so the people said, during his city trips. He was a gruff man, and though they had often proved his kind-heartedness in a case of measles, or scarlet fever, small urchins stepped aside with alacrity as he passed.

"Some on you is wrong, and some on you is maybe right," said Bill Saulswick, the village wag and philosopher, "but I know good tunes when I hears 'um; just gimme the sort, be it fiddlin', or singin', or drummin',—that tells me why I'm who, and which I'm what, and when I'm where, and I'll sit there till the lights go out."

While the villagers enjoyed the gossip, poor little Chee was in a whirl of excitement. Her days seemed a series of ups and downs. At times she could hardly wait for the great day to arrive, then in a moment her heart would sink with terror, and she would hide herself for hours until she had conquered the temptation to tell Cousin Gertrude she must break her promise. But she came of a sturdy, resolute race, — to falter would be worse than to fail, so she struggled with herself, Gertrude claiming more and more of her time as the eventful day drew nearer.

“It do beat all,” Aunt Mean would exclaim, as from the pantry window she watched the girls go through the meadow lot, “what Gertrude finds so entertainin’ about that child. She hasn’t eyes for nobody but her, gaddin’ off every day, or ridin’ to town. I should most expect her beau would make some kind of a row over it.”

For they did “gad off” every pleasant day, sometimes to the grove to plan, but more often to the minister’s. There Chee would practise on Mr. Green’s violin, while Gertrude read or talked with Mrs. Green.

A few days before the concert, Mr. Farrar met them that he might hear, for the last time, Chee's piece.

"Cousin Herman, if I play very well indeed, will you please say 'yes' to something?"

"That's rather broad," replied the gentleman; "suppose I can't say 'yes.'"

"Oh, but I know you can, just as well as not."

"What is it about?"

Chee flushed a little, but answered, smilingly, "Clothes."

"Ho, ho, that's it! Well, I guess I can go it."

Mr. Farrar considered himself an apt student of human nature. "It's only natural the child should have a little pride. It's a good thing Gertrude intends to see to a gown for her." So said the young man to himself, little doubting the exact nature of Chee's request.

Satisfied with his promise to say "yes," the little girl began to play her chosen piece.

It had taken so long to make a selection from her old pieces, Cousin Herman had bought several

new ones — marvels of creation they were to Chee. “Fixed up with the baby songs all in,” as she styled the turns and trills. She had tried to play true to the notes, but it was a hard task. To-day as she was conscientiously measuring them out, he left the room a moment to speak with the minister. Returning, he was surprised at the progress she had made in his absence. Thinking his presence had hindered her, he stole softly to the door.

With a listening expression on her face, Chee was slowly pacing the floor. The sheet of music lay on the table, face down. Undoubtedly, as Mr. Farrar recalled the selection, it was the one she was playing — but how changed! It seemed to have been but the framework for the little artist to build upon.

She finished, and brushing the damp hair from her warm forehead, looked up. Cousin Herman stood in the doorway. Chee glanced at the neglected sheet of music with a guilty look. “I forgot, Cousin Herman, I really did,” she explained, hurriedly.

“I guess you needn’t bother with the notes. I

see you have the melody in your head." He tried to speak unconcernedly.

Chee was relieved. "I'm ever so glad. You don't know how much easier it will be."

"After you have a teacher I suppose it will be necessary to tie you down to accurate reading, but until then we won't spoil your own way."

The minister came in just then, followed by his wife and Gertrude. "Is the lesson over?" he asked.

"Cousin Herman has got to say 'yes' now."

"Say 'yes?' What to?"

"That's just what he hasn't been told," replied Mr. Farrar.

Going to him, Chee drew down his head, that she might whisper in his ear. He looked perplexed. A private consultation followed, much to the amusement of the others in the room.

At first he seemed hard to persuade, but finally yielded, and Chee left him with a satisfied, "That's a good Cousin Herman."

"Gertrude," he said at parting, "you needn't order Chee's dress; that matter has already been attended to."

Gertrude was not only astonished, she was disappointed, and started to speak, then checked herself.

“After all, Herman must know what he is about. I’ll leave it to him.” Gertrude had learned one lesson; it could not be forgotten soon.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE day of the concert smilingly dawned.

At breakfast, Uncle Reuben surprised them by saying, "I'm going over the river to-day, Mean. Don't you want to go 'long, and stop to George's?"

Aunt Mean hesitated.

"You kin wear your best bunnet, so's to stop to the concert on the way back."

"Reuben Whittaker! you're not going to blow in a single cent on any concert, and you know it. If Gertrude is foolish 'nough to go and take Chee, that ain't none of my business." Aunt Mean looked toward her nieces as she spoke, but the cousins' eyes were fixed upon their plates.

"Why, Mean," said Uncle Reuben, mildly, "the minister says the hull town is going to turn out. Even —"

"When did you see the minister?" interrupted his sister.

"Even Miss Flanigin sent for her sister to take keer of the young'ns," continued Uncle Reuben, without notice of any question. "I never reckoned on our being behind the Flanigins."

"Humph! those Flanigins," was Aunt Mean's only comment. But Gertrude noticed, as they drove away, a bonnet with a purple poppy had won the day.

"What could have possessed Uncle Reuben to take her off to-day, of all days?" gleefully questioned Chee.

"Everything is turning out just right, that's a fact," replied her cousin.

A thought of half suspicion came to Chee. "You don't suppose —" she began, impressively, when Gertrude gave a little cry of pleasure, saying, "If here doesn't come Herman, the old dear, and the house all to ourselves."

What a day of it they had! With only her two good friends to watch her, Chee forgot her usual reserve, and quite surprised them with her happy chatter. Without the restraint of Aunt Mean's practical presence, some of the child's queer fancies and odd expressions crept into her talk.

Until then, Gertrude had but half realized how truly the little cousin's nature was made up of the sensitive perceptions and legendary instincts of her mother's people.

Toward evening a thunder-storm threatened. The three were sitting in Aunt Mean's plant-room at the time.

"Grandfather is speaking," said Chee, pleasantly, as the first distant mutterings of thunder were heard. Cousin Herman looked up questioningly.

"Who?" asked Gertrude.

"Grandfather — don't you hear him?"

Just then a sharp clap rang through the air. Gertrude held her fingers to her ears.

"That was M'dessun," said Chee. Then noticing her companions' bewildered glances, added, "It's very easy to know his voice from grandfather's other sons' — he talks so angrily."

The thunder still roared. Mr. Farrar closed the plant-room door. "I guess we hadn't better sit out here for awhile," he said, gathering up Gertrude's books. "We can come back, it won't last long, I think."

"Don't go! What made you shut the door?"

I love to hear them," and Chee stepped out into the rising storm fearlessly, as though the sky had been all sunshine.

"Come in, Chee. Oh, do come in!" cried Gertrude, pale with alarm.

The child ran quickly, and throwing her arms around her cousin, asked, "Why, are you sick? What is the matter? Don't you like Thunder? He is our grandfather, you know."

"Is the girl crazy?" asked Mr. Farrar.

"I think she refers to some legend," answered Gertrude. Chee had always been interesting; her personality was felt, even when she was her usual, reserved little self; to-day, all embarrassment cast away, she was fascinating.

"We don't know about it, Birdie; can't you tell us?"

"I forgot you didn't know," replied Chee. Then as if in penitence, she added, "I'll close the door again, if you'd rather, Cousin Gertrude."

"No, leave it open. The storm is going around us. It will be pleasanter soon. Now tell us what you meant by 'Grandfather.'"

So Chee began, — the rain dripping from the

roof, and the fresh, purified air blowing in at the wide-swung door, — “Why, as I said, Thunder is our grandfather. He has three boys. That loud, sharp sound that hurt Cousin Gertrude’s ears was the baby; he is cross and cruel. But grandfather will never allow him to harm us. Grandfather lets him kill animals sometimes.

“His other sons are kind, gentle boys; they never do any harm, but cool the air instead, and make the earth fresh again. Thunder that just threatens and mutters is grandfather’s voice.”

“What about lightning?” asked Cousin Herman, with a twinkle in his eye. “Is that kind and good?”

Chee laughed. “Lightning? She’s — well, she’s his wife.” They all laughed at her answer, and Mr. Farrar mischievously glanced at Gertrude. Chee noticed that she blushed, but took courage and added, “There’s an old story about grandfather; would you like to hear it?”

Of course they were only too glad to keep her talking, so, clasping her hands around one knee, she commenced the story — her low, dreamy voice fitting well with the tale.

“ Well, once, years and years ago,¹ there were two Indian homes. In each home there was a beautiful daughter ; they were lovely, good friends, but they couldn't see each other very often, for their wigwams were such a long ways apart. But one awful hot day, one of them asked her mother if she couldn't go and see the other girl, and her mother said ‘ no,’ 'cause she was so pretty. But the girl teased so hard she had to let her go.

“ She hadn't gone very far before a tall man came and walked beside her, and said such nice things to her she forgot all about where she was going, until she found right in front of them a big rock with a hole in it. The man said, ‘ This is where I live. Won't you come in ?’

“ She was afraid of the dark, so she wouldn't go. But he coaxed, and finally she said she'd go in if he'd go first. So he went, but just the minute he got inside, he turned right into an ugly old Wi-will-mecq, and she was scared most to pieces.”

“ May we ask what a ‘ Wi-will-mecq ’ is ?” asked Mr. Farrar.

¹ An abbreviation of a familiar Indian legend.



“‘I’VE SAVED YOU FROM THE GREAT WI - WILL - MECQ’ ”

"It's a great, horrid worm, and the girl tried to run away from it, but just then an awful loud thundering was heard, and she didn't know anything more until she opened her eyes in a great big room with an old man in it.

"He said, 'I'm your grandfather. I've saved you from the great Wi-will-mecq.' Then he showed it to her, out-doors, all chopped up in a hundred little pieces. He told the girl she must give him a smoke when he asked for it, to show she was grateful. Then he sent her home safe and sound. Do you like that story?"

"Very much," answered Cousin Herman. "But I can see from her face that Gertie is wondering how in the world the girl could give old Thunder a smoke."

"The Indians used always to do that after grandfather was so good to one of their people. They build a fire out-doors every time grandfather calls for it, and put some tobacco in it; it goes up in the smoke, and so he gets it.¹ Now you see I couldn't be afraid, could I?"

Cousin Gertrude patted Chee's braids. Mr.

¹ Mentioned by A. L. Alger in "Indian Tents."

Farrar whistled softly to himself. Chee noticed that neither answered her question.

"Well, anyway," she exclaimed, her eyes flashing, "you can ask just as many people as you like, and every one will tell you that there never was an Indian or anything he owned killed in a thunderstorm.¹ My daddy asked lots of wise people, and none ever could tell of a single one."

Mr. Farrar could no longer whistle, his lips were trying to smile. With a smothered "Ha, ha," he hurried out to feed his horse.

Chee was very much displeased. She went to the open door, and leaning her head against the casement, looked over the freshened fields. Before long, Gertrude joined her. Drawing the little girl to her, she too stood watching the landscape.

"Birdie," she asked, at length, then hesitated, as though loath to go on, "do you honestly believe that pretty little story?"

Chee turned her face toward her questioner, all resentment gone — that soft light in her eyes, only there when she was deeply moved.

"Cousin Gertrude, dear," she answered, looking

¹ Universally believed among Indians.

clearly into the other's face, "don't worry. I know what you mean. Yes, and no. For the time I was telling it I believed it. But now when you ask me, I know quite well that Our Father sends the thunder, just as He sends the rain when we need it. Daddy told me so. But anyway, I shouldn't be afraid because it's just the same. He won't let anything hurt me. Daddy told me that, and I think I should know it, anyway. Sometimes when the breeze blows softly against my cheek, it tells me so, and if ever I forget, the stars at night tell me how wrong it is to fear Our Father who loves us so."

Cousin Gertrude made no reply, she only held the little one closer. Chee was not a heathen, but she was certainly a strange child.

CHAPTER XIV.

EVENING came. Mr. Farrar drove Gertrude and Chee to the minister's home, and then hurried to the hotel. Everything looked favorable; the city musicians had arrived, and the night promised to be perfect.

Gertrude was already dressed for the entertainment, but Chee still wore her pink gingham. "Come, Chee, you won't have any more than time," she urged, anxious to know the contents of a box Chee had brought. "Don't you want some help?"

"I've tried it on before," answered the little girl, as she tugged up-stairs with her package.

Eight o'clock drew near. The street in front of the hall was filled with farmers' vehicles and passing townsfolk. Inside was the important bustle of ushers rushing to and fro, and the sound of instruments being tuned.

As the moments passed, the throng grew dense. Fans seemed to sway the audience back and forth. At last the curtains rose — the house was packed.

The chorus of white-clad children lifted its voice. It was a good chorus — the finest of which Chesterfield had ever boasted. Sadie's grandpa was satisfied. The village philosopher's psychological chart was being revealed to him. Even the doctor was elated. Beside him, sat "Cit'zen P'liteness," which coincidence might have been fortunate for the boy, who more than once, in extreme excitement, choked and nearly swallowed his gum.

The musicians did their best. The people demanded encore after encore. It grew late. The enthusiasm lulled. Little children slept in their parents' arms; here and there a fretful one cried out.

A hush fell over the stage, and people waited uneasily; children became still more impatient; the very air grew intense. A young lady near the front was faint — it was the one with blue eyes and golden hair. Soon a soft step was heard. All eyes were again fastened on the stage.

A small, brown-faced girl stood near the centre.

She was dressed in gay Indian clothes; her long black unbraided hair fell nearly to her knees; bright beads were twined about her neck and arms; bare ankles showed above wee moccasins. In one hand she carried a small red violin and a long bow.

The people were too much interested to applaud. All strove for a better view of the dark, flushed face before them.

Catching sight of the golden-haired young woman, the child's lips parted in a smile. Caressingly she put the violin under her arm, and nodded encouragement. The white face of her friend banished, for a moment, her own timidity.

The audience took this act of recognition to themselves, shouting and clapping again and again. The small face grew frightened, but the sight of a certain purple poppy, nervously bobbing among the sea of heads, restored its bravery. The little maid tucked the instrument beneath her chin. The confusion ceased.

With her eyes uplifted, as though listening, she drew the bow across the strings — first tremblingly, then lovingly, and, finally, triumphantly.



"IT WAS AS THOUGH ALL THE PLAINTIVE STORY OF A DYING RACE HAD BEEN STORED IN THAT LITTLE RED CASE"

Once only her eyes lowered, sought the purple poppy, and lifted again. With more and more feeling came the music. It was as though all the plaintive story of a dying race had been stored in that little red case. Their hardships and sorrows; their wild life of the woods, the lakes, and the prairies; their weird chants and incantations; their joys and pinings now sobbed, now sung at the touch of small brown fingers.

Not a person stirred; even the children grew intent; for a moment the fans were poised; breathlessly the people listened. The music ceased. Tears were on cheeks fair and seamed.

A man appeared before the platform. It was Mr. Green, the minister. "Our little townswoman has been requested to render, as a special favor, that beloved melody, 'Nearer, My God, to Thee.'" He spoke with earnestness, and retired immediately.

A strange expression came over the small musician's face, a look so reverent, so pure, that the audience leaned forward in their seats. With an upward, yearning glance the child began to play.

If before, the dazzling, fantastic garb of the

player had blended with the dreamy legends of her tender music, not so now ; none looked at the girl save unconsciously to watch her face. Each person felt alone in holy communion with the music which descended as from heaven itself to the depths of their souls.

These strains spoke not of the forest, nor of the sea. They rung out in condemnation ; they plead with tender reproachfulness ; they swept through each soul, causing it to vibrate the notes in very sympathy with themselves, but it was always "Thou and me," to each heart the world was not.

The notes died away. A great sigh arose from the audience. The curtain fell, and quietly the concourse of people dissolved. There was no crowding, no laughter ; there was little talk. As from a temple the people passed slowly out.

"Was it the instrument? Who can tell?" The clergyman asked himself that question. Cousin Herman asked it. Many others queried over it.

It may have been. Who can tell? Strangely enough, no one ventured to ask the little half-

breed. Had they done so, she doubtless would have answered, in her reverent way, "It was not me. It was just Our Father," surely adding, "and Daddy Joe's fiddle."

CHAPTER XV.

TIME has passed. Though Aunt Mean and Uncle Reuben still live at the Bend, years have left their traces. They rest now through the day in their armchairs. Their faces are happy — far happier than in the old hard-working days.

Aunt Mean's strong-minded features soften as she talks to Reuben, through his ear-trumpet, of the long ago.

"You were always a good woman, Mean," he answers, soothingly. How love forgets its hardships and recounts its joys.

"I wasn't no heathen, brother, but I was only half converted until that night."

"We was all revived," gently replies Uncle Reuben, "even the minister. Bless his soul, he's got his reward for goodness now."

"Hush! she's coming."

Footsteps sound upon the stairs. A sweet, low voice mingles with the Irish brogue of Biddy in the kitchen.

Soon a slight, middle-aged woman, dressed in black, enters the room. Her face tells of grief borne patiently, of joy from a trustful heart. Mrs. Green brings an open letter.

"From the children?"

"Yes, auntie. The little ones are all well. Herman has promised them a trip to the farm at Easter. Gertrude's cold is better. They enclosed a letter from Chee."

And so together they sit in the lamplight, lingering over their weekly pleasure—the children's letter.

Most old places have their ghost stories. The Whittakers' at the Bend is not an exception. Long ago the incident happened, but to this day neither of the old people are fond of the attic. Even the creaking stairway brings to Aunt Mean's mind sad strains of music.

"Of course it was my guilty conscience, but, that night when I got up with a cramp, and heard the

same old tune that poor Joe played the day before he died, it seemed as though my bones was frozen stiff.

"If I'd only done as you done, Reuben, and gone straight to the minister's, it would have saved me nights of agony. Lots of times I used to hear them sounds after all but me was sound asleep. But I never dared get up. I'd hide my head underneath the bedclothes, and pray the Lord if He would only forgive me my hardness against poor Joe and his child, I'd do anything in the world.

"Ah, them was hard days, and that was a strange night, when I see the child and the fiddle on the platform, and the hull thing come over me like a streak of lightning."

"'Twas the Lord's way, Mean, my girl, and we won't find no fault."

"No, Reuben, and though you ain't the one to say it, in your heart you're mighty glad I'm a different woman from them days. I say it myself, as oughtn't to."

"You're not the only one, Mean. 'Twas all the Lord's doin's."

And Chee? Few know her by that name, or even the story of her birth and childhood.

In a far-off city, surrounded by luxury that wealth may buy, amid flattery that fame may bring, a certain celebrated musician still hears the echo of a little child's plaintive prayer: "And if Thou do, I'll do something for Thee sometime, only I can't think of anything now. Thy kingdom come. Amen."

It is Sabbath Day. As the twilight is falling over the streets of that far-off city, you may enter the wide doors of a great building.

Many people of different nationalities reverently tread its dim aisles. The turmoil of life is forgotten in the hush of this peacefulness.

While you wait, a strain of tender music breathes softly through the place. The sounds scarcely break the silence. Stillness itself is given a voice. The faces about you brighten. Bitter lines soften; bowed shoulders straighten.

For one glorified hour you listen. And when the last evangel note has trembled its message to every part of the vast room, even from the frescoed dome to the deepest places in the hearts of the listeners, you silently turn away.

People of different races, speaking different tongues, — each soul with its own burden, griefs, or sins, — have all been lifted nearer heaven by the same voice of lingering music.

Is it a wonder that no other instrument, however precious, can say to weary hearts, “He is sure to have heard; it will be all right pretty soon,” as Daddy Joe’s fiddle?

THE END.







